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What's Hot in Entrepreneurship Research 2018?

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Taking stock of what has been achieved in a particular research field, where a field currently stands, and where it might move to in the near future is an important undertaking. In this research brief, we present the results of a survey of 225 experienced entrepreneurship researchers who shared their insights on a) what topical areas are currently important in entrepreneurship research and b) what methods might be especially useful to provide interesting and relevant answers to old and new research questions. The results suggest no dramatic differences in the relevance of topics compared to our original survey conducted five years ago (Kuckertz 2013), but do indicate that the field is moving forward in terms of methods by embracing the “gold standard” of academic rigor inspired by the natural sciences (e.g., experimental designs) and by considering methods that make it possible to capture the complexity of entrepreneurial phenomena.

Entrepreneurship as a research discipline is largely established within the academic array of core subjects. The field however remains a vibrant one, a status at least partially due to its research objectives and the many emerging practical phenomena.

Entrepreneurial behavior quite often relates to innovative behavior and this creates an ever-changing landscape of entrepreneurship. Despite its academic acceptance, the research field is still so young that it continues to be characterized by its rapid development—especially with regard to research topics, but also with reference to the methods explaining entrepreneurial phenomena.

This development of entrepreneurship as a research discipline has been illustrated regularly in academic publications both at the national and international level. Numerous publications have made valuable contributions to the understanding of entrepreneurship as a research field moving forward, but articles are usually characterized by a backward-looking approach that means they can only provide a limited indication of future developments in the research field.

In order to contribute to the current discussion in the research field of entrepreneurship and to coordinate future research efforts in the field in the best possible way, it is essential to be aware of

currently discussed and/or newly emerging topics and methods in entrepreneurship research.

The entrepreneurship research group at the University of Hohenheim addressed this issue for the first time in 2013 with the first “What’s hot in entrepreneurship” survey (Kuckertz 2013).

Survey Design

We developed an **online survey** to gather information from experienced researchers about current topics and methods in entrepreneurship. Respondents could indicate a) **what topical area** they would consider so relevant that they would recommend it to fresh doctoral students and b) **what particular method** they consider interesting. Moreover, the survey design included the option to indicate whether a particular topic had primarily academic or practical potential and whether the preferred method was a fundamental or new research method from the respondents’ viewpoint.

Five years later it seems worthwhile to take stock of both topics and methods again. To do so, we conducted a global online survey among entrepreneurship researchers. The survey identifies currently emerging topics in the field of entrepreneurship and their academic and practical potential. Furthermore, the survey data illuminate both methodological fundamentals and novel and/or previously neglected methods in entrepreneurship.

Understanding the entrepreneurial process is still the most promising topical area

Figure 1 displays the 14 most frequently mentioned topics in entrepreneurship in 2018. It is important to note that all topical areas in this list have some potential. Even topics mentioned comparatively rarely should be considered interesting, as they were mentioned by the study participants and thus, compared to other topics, have not been ignored. Moreover, a topic receiving fewer nominations does not necessarily indicate that it has less potential than a topic with more nominations, the topic might still be one that is growing in importance.

The most frequently mentioned topics—the entrepreneurial process, social entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial behavior, and psychology in/of entrepreneurship—were also mentioned more

often, because most of them include many sub-categories.

Within the topic *entrepreneurial process* for example, growth, human resource management, value and venture creation, business models, and cooperation and networks are particularly relevant sub-categories. In addition, those surveyed saw future research potential in sub-categories such as venture performance and development, exit and entrepreneurial failure, and also in entrepreneurial marketing.

Another topic considered promising by the survey participants is *entrepreneurial behavior*; for example, in research areas like entrepreneurial intention and action, entrepreneurial decision making, or the work–life balance of entrepreneurs. Moreover, respondents still see potential in the area of *social entrepreneurship* that has been increasingly discussed and explored in recent years. That potential lies both in the topic of social entrepreneurship in general, and in areas such as the determinants of social entrepreneurship or scaling social enterprises.

The topic of *psychology in / of entrepreneurship* received the same number of nominations as did social entrepreneurship. Particularly noteworthy in this topical area are the sub-categories of entrepreneurial cognition, emotions in entrepreneurship, and the entrepreneurial team processes.

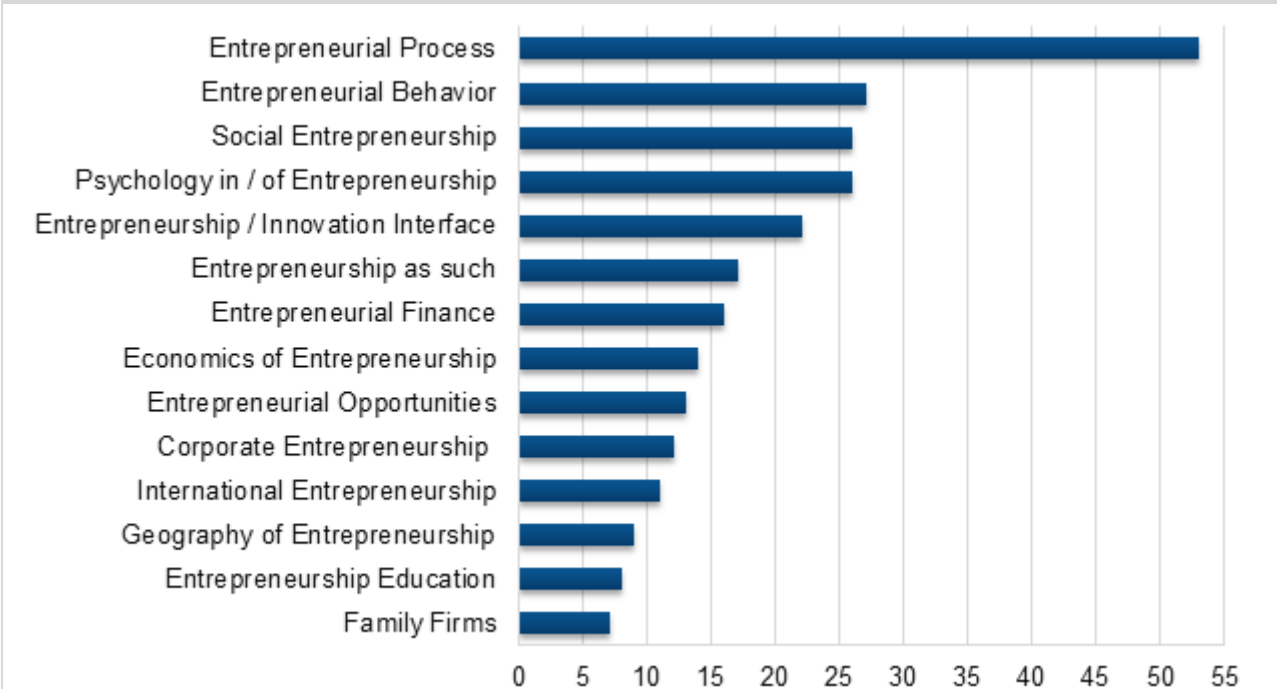
Expert Selection

To qualify as an expert for the purposes of this study researchers had to have published at least one research paper in a **leading entrepreneurship journal** over the course of the period 2014–2016. The accepted journals were the Journal of Business Venturing, Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice, the International Small Business Journal, the Journal of Small Business Management, the Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal, Small Business Economics, Entrepreneurship & Regional Development and the International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal. The survey was conducted from early November 2017 to early December 2017 and produced a **response rate** of 17.33% (n = 225).

Most promising topical areas in entrepreneurship research

Figure 1

Categorized responses to the open question: "Imagine fresh doctoral students asking you for advice on what topic to pursue in their thesis. What area within entrepreneurship research would you recommend to them?"



Source: University of Hohenheim, Entrepreneurship Research Group
Based on recommendations from 225 experienced entrepreneurship researchers

Comparing the practical and academic potential of topical areas reveals large discrepancies

If the respondents' answers are arranged according to the academic or practical potential they attribute to a topic rather than by the frequency of nomination, the results look markedly different. The left half of Table 1 shows these two perspectives—the academic and practical potential of a topic—and reflects the average assessments of the respondents. The perceptions of the participants reveal a strong discrepancy between the academic and practical potential of the hot topics in entrepreneurship in 2018.

For example, the most frequently mentioned topic *entrepreneurial process* is in only eleventh place in the assessment of the academic potential of the topics, and even in the estimation of the practical potential of the topics, the topic only occupies fourth place.

Another notable aspect is that the topic *entrepreneurial behavior* ranks only in eighth place for academic potential and ninth place for practical potential.

The topic *psychology in/of entrepreneurship* is ranked fifth according to the assessment of the academic potential of the topic and tenth according to the assessment of its practical potential. The topic *social entrepreneurship* performs best of the top hot topics in entrepreneurship in 2018 attaining fifth place for academic potential combined with a third place ranking for practical potential.

However, the discrepancies in the placement of the top topics appear comparatively small in light of the large discrepancy in the placement of the topic *entrepreneurship education*. The answers of the respondents suggest that academically the topic seems largely to have been exhausted; however, the practical potential of the topic appears to remain quite high. Conversely, research questions addressing the topic *corporate entrepreneurship* seem to have great academic potential, but comparatively little practical potential from a researcher's perspective.

Topical areas and research methods

Table 1

Ranked responses to the question “I would recommend this topic because of its academic potential” vs. “I would recommend this topic because of its potential with respect to entrepreneurial practice” (for topical areas) and “This is an essential method every entrepreneurship researcher needs to understand” vs. “This is a new or neglected method with the potential to produce new insights” (for research methods) measured on a 5-point Likert scale anchored with *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree*.

Topical Areas				Research Methods			
	Academic Potential		Practical Potential		Fundamental Method		New or Neglected Method
1.	Geography (4.89)	1.	Entrepreneurship / Innovation Interface (4.68)	1.	Case Study Analysis (4.25)	1.	Ethnography (4.33)
2.	International Entrepreneurship (4.64)	2.	Entrepreneurship Education (4.61)	2.	Multilevel Modeling (3.86)	2.	Multilevel Modeling (4.00)
3.	Corporate Entrepreneurship (4.58)	3.	Social Entrepreneurship (4.54)	3.	Panel Data Analysis (3.83)		Bayesian Methods (4.00)
4.	Entrepreneurship as such (4.53)	4.	Entrepreneurial Process (4.40)	4.	Ethnography (3.67)	4.	Data Mining (3.90)
5.	Psychology in/of Entrepreneurship (4.50)	5.	International Entrepreneurship (4.36)	5.	Bayesian Methods (3.33)	5.	Experiments (3.88)
	Social Entrepreneurship (4.50)	6.	Geography (4.33)	6.	Structural Equation Modeling (3.29)		Case Study Analysis (3.88)
7.	Entrepreneurial Opportunities (4.46)	7.	Entrepreneurial Opportunities (4.23)	7.	Network Analysis (3.25)	7.	(fs)QCA (3.80)
8.	Entrepreneurial Behavior (4.44)	8.	Economics of Entrepreneurship (4.21)	8.	Experiments (3.12)	8.	Network Analysis (3.77)
9.	Family Firms (4.43)	9.	Entrepreneurial Behavior (4.07)	9.	(fs)QCA (3.10)		Structural Equation Modeling (3.77)
10.	Entrepreneurship / Innovation Interface (4.41)	10.	Psychology in/of Entrepreneurship (4.00)	10.	Data Mining (2.90)	10.	Panel Data Analysis (3.17)
11.	Entrepreneurial Process (4.34)	11.	Corporate Entrepreneurship (3.91)				
12.	Economics of Entrepreneurship (4.14)	12.	Entrepreneurship as such (3.88)				
13.	Entrepreneurship Education (4.13)	13.	Family Firms (3.86)				
14.	Entrepreneurial Finance (4.0)	14.	Entrepreneurial Finance (3.75)				

Source: University of Hohenheim, Entrepreneurship Research Group
Based on recommendations from 225 experienced entrepreneurship researchers

Methods that follow the “gold standard” derived from natural sciences seem especially promising

Figure 2 summarizes the ten most commonly mentioned research methods with potential in 2018. In contrast to the “hot” topics in entrepreneurship in 2018, in the interest of conciseness, only the top ten methods are listed. When we sorted the answers to the method question according to paradigms, we noted the

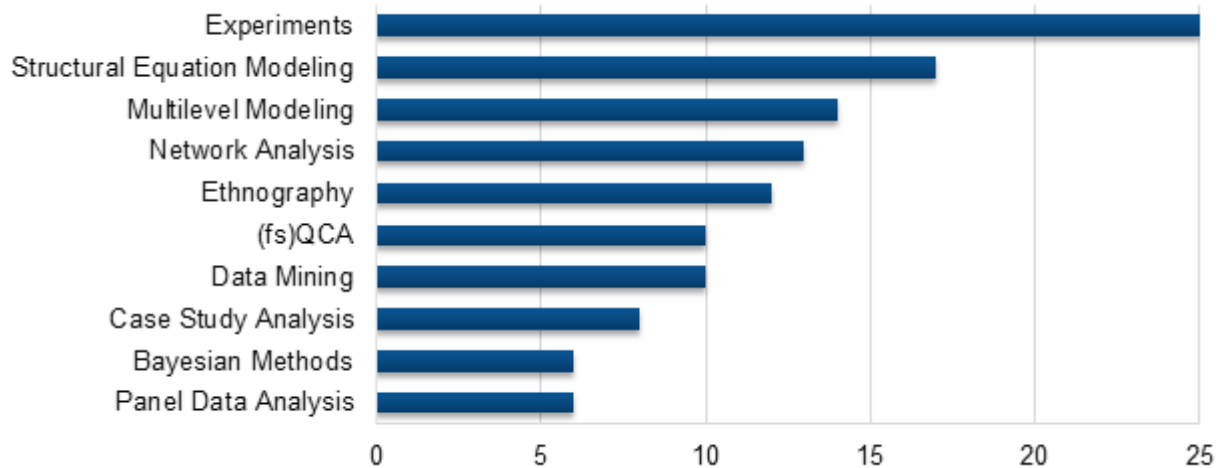
presence of methods from both the qualitative and quantitative paradigms.

Furthermore, some methods that receive only a few nominations and are therefore not included in the top ten research methods for 2018, address other methods that may not be clearly assigned to a particular paradigm (e.g., neuroscience methods such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), positron emission tomography (PET), and utilizing electroencephalograms (EEG)).

Most promising methods in entrepreneurship research

Figure 2

Categorized responses to the open question: "Research methods are constantly evolving. What particular method do you consider interesting, but have not yet found time to master?"



Source: University of Hohenheim, Entrepreneurship Research Group
Based on recommendations from 225 experienced entrepreneurship researchers

Respondents

The contributing experts are from academic institutions around the world, with the USA, Italy, Spain, Germany, and the UK accounting for half of the survey sample. All participants are familiar with the topic of entrepreneurship and have an average of 13.7 years (Standard Deviation = 8.4) of experience in this research field. Among the group, 48.4% reported their primary area of interest as the field of entrepreneurship, 15.6% the field of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), 19.6% the research field of innovation, and 16.4% reported other unspecified research areas. In terms of career stage, **experienced researchers** dominate the sample—only 0.4% are doctoral students and 8.0% are postdocs. In contrast, 17.3% work on the assistant professor/lecturer level, 30.7% on the associate professor/senior lecturer level and 37.7% are full or chaired professors. The categories professor emeritus and other each account for 3.1% of the respondent group.

Overall, the results of the method question show that the respondents see potential in both qualitative and quantitative methods individually and in combination in the course of a single study, as configurational approaches such as (fs)QCA would allow.

Figure 2 illustrates that experimental designs, structural equation modeling, and multilevel modeling are the three most frequently mentioned research methods reflecting researchers' current interests. A closer look at the answers associated with the top three methods reveals that the respondents consider both laboratory and field experiments relevant.

In the area of structural equation modeling, the respondents consider the application of the partial least squares (PLS) technique and latent growth modeling particularly promising. Within the realm of multilevel modeling, the respondents consider the application of hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to be particularly noteworthy. Consequently, we see methods that follow the "gold standard" set by the natural sciences (i.e., experiments) or that acknowledge the complexity of either causal relationships (i.e., structural equation modeling) and data structures (i.e., multilevel modeling) as especially promising.

Qualitative methods still have great research potential

Based on the averaged answers of the respondents to the statements: "This is an essential method every entrepreneurship researcher needs to understand," and "This is a

new or neglected method with the potential to produce new insights,” the above-mentioned methods were classified into one of the two categories *fundamental method* and *new or neglected method*, as illustrated in the right-hand half of Table 1. Similar to the topics in the previous section, this procedure significantly changes the placement of the methods.

The column “fundamental method” indicates the extent to which the respondents believe that a method is well-known, often applied, and should therefore be viewed as a must-know method in the research field of entrepreneurship. Here the respondents mostly placed methods of the qualitative paradigm to the fore citing examples like case study analysis or ethnography. But even the method of multilevel modeling is perceived by some as basic.

However, at the same time the respondents believe that the method can still generate (radically) new

insights, as the position of the method in the column *new or neglected method* indicates. This also applies to ethnographical approaches. Furthermore, the researchers surveyed hope to gain new insights from approaches such as Bayesian methods or data mining (e.g., in the context of big data analysis).

Furthermore, configurational approaches such as (fs)QCA seem to be establishing themselves. Whereas five years ago this was viewed solely as an emergent method in entrepreneurship research (Kuckertz 2013), a significant part of the entrepreneurship research community is now of the opinion that it should be classified as fundamental.

References

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Conclusion

Entrepreneurship is an ever-changing research field as indicated by our survey identifying the current most relevant topics and methods. The 14 topics discussed in this research brief can serve as a stimulus for the development of new and relevant research questions. However, it is important to note the discrepancy between the number of nominations and the perceived academic and practical potential of some of the topical areas. Topics with a high number of nominations, but only moderate academic and practical relevance, might indicate that the discourse within the topic could already be moving toward its conclusion. Second, the top research methods identified could be useful in two ways. Perhaps the methodological fundamentals revealed signal the direction novice researchers (and students) in particular might have to take to develop their individual method portfolio, or alternatively, the methods that we classified as new or neglected could be applied by experienced researchers to generate additional knowledge through the use of unusual methodological approaches in established thematic fields.

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